SERMONS

ON THE

EVIDENCE OF A FUTURE STATE

OF

REWARDS AND PUNISHMENTS,

ARISING FROM A VIEW OF OUR

NATURE AND CONDITION;

IN WHICH ARE CONSIDERED

SOME OBJECTIONS OF HUME:

PREACHED BEFORE THE

UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE.

By WILLIAM CRAVEN, B.D.

FELLOW OF ST. JOHN'S COLLEGE,

AND

PROFESSOR OF ARABIC.

CAMBRIDGE:

Printed by J. ARCHDEACON Printer to the UNIVERSITY;

For J. & J. MERRILL, in Cambridge; B. WHITE, T. CADELL, J. WILKIE, and RICHARDSON & URQUHART, in London; and J. FLETCHER, and D. PRINCE, at Oxford.

MDCCLXXXIII.

BRITISH MUSEUM

The following Sermons have in part been publiſhed before, but now appear with conſiderable additions, and the plan of them is entirely altered, to adapt them the better as an anſwer to the objections made of late to the doctrine of a future ſtate of rewards and puniſhments.

SERMON I.

On a ſtate of diſcipline and probation, preparatory to a ſtate of rewards and puniſhments.

Let us not be weary in well-doing: for in due ſeaſon we ſhall reap, if we faint not.
GALAT. vi. 9.

WE ſhall be reconciled to our ſituation and circumſtances, if it appear, that the ſeeming hardſhips we labour under will terminate in our advantage; that the plan of our future

welfare and happineſs is carried on under the diſguiſe and cover of preſent evils; and that the imperfections and miſeries of life, which we in our ignorance complain of, are ſuch as make this world a fit paſſage to a happier and more perfect ſtate.*

First, the world is a ſchool of diſcipline, where we are to acquire the improvement we want. We are endued with a ſenſe which naturally approves of what is juſt and good: but, if left to itſelf deſtitute of other helps, it is naked and deficient. Though it wiſhes and intends well, the aſſiſtance of a guide is neceſſary to direct it, and to point out the ways by which it may beſt attain its end: and this is the office

* It is taken in ſome meaſure for granted, as a matter proved beforehand and admitted, that our ſouls are immortal, and that in general we are to exiſt hereafter in ſome ſtate or other; and our particular exiſtence only, in a future ſtate of rewards and puniſhments diſtributed according to the rules of ſtrict juſtice, is the queſtion chiefly conſidered and vindicated from objections.

office of reaſon and judgement. And even when provided with their aid, we ſtill require a further ſupport, in order to be completely furniſhed. It is neceſſary after all that we ſhould practiſe, as well as diſcern, that which is right and fit: and this is a matter that depends on the will. We ſee what are the aſſociates our moral ſenſe ſtands in need of: we will proceed to inquire how they are to be procured.

To begin with reaſon and judgement; as we learn in our early years to diſtinguiſh between right and wrong, and are taught the leſſons of morality, they will at the ſame time diſcover themſelves and gradually improve. A little experience will convince us, that our actions, beſides their more immediate end, are apt ſometimes to draw on a train of effects we did not foreſee or ſufficiently conſider. This will put us upon weighing the reſult of our conduct before we engage in it, and

on examining, not only thoſe conſe-quences which are obvious and lie near at hand, but ſuch as are remote; teach us to extend our views, and, inſtead of looking only a little way before us, to allow ourſelves a more ample field of thought and reflection to range in. Thus our minds, which at the firſt are con-tracted and narrow, will open and become enlarged; will learn to take in ſeveral objects, and attend to a variety of con-ſiderations, at once.

But further; as we advance in life, and our connections with mankind grow more and more numerous, the ſcheme of our duty muſt neceſſarily be rendered more complicated and intricate, as well as wide and comprehenſive; ſo as to in-volve a competition of intereſts, and en-gage us often under different and con-trary obligations at one and the ſame time. Here ſome dexterity and ſkill will be required to reſolve our difficulties, to

decide

decide fairly between oppoſite claims. By this means our mental powers, while they expand and dilate, will be formed alſo to a certain degree of accuracy; and we ſhall acquire an expert correctneſs, as well as compaſs of diſcernment.

Thus we may greatly improve in our judgement and underſtanding from all that we meet with or obſerve in life: and our ſituation, with reſpect alſo to the diſcipline of the will, is equally favourable. We have to contend with our unruly appetites and deſires: but then, by the conſtitution of our frame, they return not always upon us with the ſame force. As we prevail over them, they grow weaker and weaker, till at laſt they yield of courſe: and it is in this habit that our moral ſecurity conſiſts. Now we are here ſupplied with opportunities of acquiring that habit. The irregular and uncertain diſtribution of rewards and puniſhments in this life, the evils we ſuffer

or dread, create the ſtruggles that are ſo frequent between intereſt and duty; and form thoſe trials by which our wills are to be corrected and fortified. Pain and ſickneſs, diſappointments and adverſity, are of uſe in reſtraining us from a licentious courſe; in taming that pride which is of a growth ſo natural to us; and in ſubduing the haughty and ſtubborn mind to the yoke of patience and moderation. It is thus we are to improve under the calamities and diſorders of life.

The chaſtiſement we meet with from the world, though ſeemingly ſevere, is good and wholeſome. The imperfections and weakneſs of our condition expoſe us to perpetual difficulties: but it is by a ſeries of ſucceſsful conflicts that virtue is to gain at laſt the aſcendency; that is the ſtated law of her triumph. At the firſt eſtabliſhment of her empire over the heart, ſhe has to encounter an oppoſition

the

the greateſt and ſtrongeſt: by length of time, her authority comes to be acknowledged and revered as ſacred.

But if this be a true hiſtory of our conſtitution and nature; if the faculties of the will and underſtanding are not created perfect, but may be brought by care and diſcipline to a certain degree of perfection; it appears neceſſary, on the ſuppoſition that happineſs is intended and kept in reſerve for us, that we ſhould firſt be placed in a ſituation where we may receive the improvement we are capable of, in order to qualify us for a better and ſuperiour ſtate, in which a proficiency in knowledge and virtue may be requiſite. This life ſeems fitted for the purpoſe of moral improvement: we may fairly ſuppoſe therefore, that we are brought into it with a view to thoſe very ends.

The

The chief difficulty, in conſidering this world as a place of diſcipline, may be thought to lie here, that in fact it too often proves a very different thing. Many, inſtead of availing themſelves of any opportunities of moral improvement, become on the contrary wicked and depraved from a commerce with mankind. So far this life fails of attaining its end. The true purpoſe, however, ſucceeds in ſome, we may charitably believe, in numberleſs inſtances. But if, unfortunately, we are not at liberty to conſider this world as a place of diſcipline, where all make a due improvement; it remains for us, to conceive of it ſomewhat under a different notion, which will ſeem the more juſt becauſe applicable to the circumſtances of all, that of a ſtate of probation, where we muſt firſt give ſome proof of ourſelves, before we are diſpoſed of finally hereafter.

If men will not prepare in this life for a bet-

a better, they muſt expect a worſe. A moral government is ſeen in a proper diſtribution of puniſhments as well as rewards: and if puniſhment cannot be inflicted, where guilt has not been incurred; ſo rewards ſuppoſe a previous merit. We are willing to allow, that a ſtate of exquiſite miſery ſhould only take place, if at all, after a ſtate of wickedneſs, ſuch too as has been obſtinate and atrocious: but ought not alſo a ſtate of complete happineſs to be preceded by one, where we have given proof of our good deſerts, at leaſt in ſome ſmall degree? May not as much be ſaid for the order of theſe ſtates in the one way as in the other? Is not a propriety of arrangement alike diſcernible in both caſes? We indeed, who begin our exiſtence only here, who can neither plead our merits, nor yet be accuſed of guilt in any former ſtate, are undeſerving, at the time we enter this life, either of reward or puniſhment, of conſummate happineſs or miſery. We

are to be placed, as it ſhould ſeem, in a world, where there is a mixture of good and evil; where happineſs and miſery reign not abſolutely or ſingly, but divide the empire between them. We actually are placed in ſuch a world: and we muſt look on ourſelves as put to the trial; as giving a proof of our behaviour, that we may receive the fruits of it hereafter.

The good and evil, we all partake of by turns in one degree or other, and ſome, through a ſudden change in their affairs, in a remarkable degree, make this world a ſtate of probation in various ways: one while by bringing to the teſt, our fortitude, our patience and reſignation; another while, our ſelf-denial, our moderation and humility. The ſeveral ſtages of life from infancy to old age, have each their peculiar foibles and paſſions to guard againſt. And thus we are expoſed to every ſpecies of temptation and difficulty. But can this life be made

to

to us one conſtant ſcene of trials perpetually varied, without our meeting at the laſt with a proper retribution? We have no reaſon to preſume this of the Being who diſpoſes of us. At preſent, we neither enjoy uninterrupted pleaſure, nor ſuffer continual pain. We are not conſcious, when we entered this life, of having deſerved either. A mixture of both, in ſome certain degree and proportion, ſuch as we now experience, ſeems to be the true temperament that is proper and ſuitable for us. And ſince we are ſo far treated as our circumſtances require, we may expect, that God will perſevere in dealing with us according to our deſerts; and be ready, after we have finiſhed our courſe of trial, from whence it will appear how far we have deſerved well or ill in this period of our exiſtence, to aſſign to us in the next our due puniſhment or reward.

It cannot be thought unreaſonable, to make

make pure unmixed happineſs the reſult of choice and deſert; to beſtow the full reward of virtue on ſuch only as have teſtified their love and regard for it. But that regard would not have been ſo apparent, the merit of chooſing good and ſhunning evil could not have been ſo great, had virtue and happineſs, vice and miſery, been made every where inſeparable; or had men been created much more perfect in their natures: and ſo had been determined to a right choice, both by the bent of inclination, and by a near as well as ſure proſpect of rewards and puniſhments. It appears, as if an imperfect ſtate were, at leaſt, not an improper forerunner of one more perfect.

Thus much ſeems agreeable to reaſon: we will inquire into the matter of fact. We are in an imperfect ſtate, where at the ſame time that we are liable to act wrong as well as right, and are prone to evil, yet a good and bad behaviour are not

not conſtantly diſtinguiſhed by a proper puniſhment and reward, to ſerve as a check on our natural depravity. However, this ſtate, defective as it may ſeem, leads, we may believe, to another that is more perfect. It ſupplies us with opportunities of enlarging our faculties, and of acquiring improved habits; ſo as to qualify us for a ſtation and ſphere, for which we were originally unfit. Our condition is every way adapted to the purpoſe of putting us to difficulties and trial: and according to our behaviour, we become poſſeſſed of a certain degree of merit or demerit; being at the firſt entirely deſtitute of either. We ſeem then to be preparing for a ſtate, which will be thought of a ſuperiour order to the preſent, whether we conſider it as one, where certain qualifications are neceſſary to make us proper for it; or one, where rewards and puniſhments will be diſtributed regularly according to our deſerts.

We meet not here with a gratuitous communication of perfection and happineſs. We ſeldom can become poſſeſſed of any advantages, or make any attainments, unleſs we are acceſſories, and exert ſome endeavours of our own. The various endowments and graces of the mind, both intellectual and moral, are in a certain meaſure the fruits of care and application. And how is it with regard to the ſupport and health of the body? The neceſſaries and conveniences of life are not preſented ready for uſe, as the ſpontaneous gifts of nature: we are only ſupplied with materials; it is left as a taſk for us to prepare and adorn them. Our ſituation is ſuch as is every way to be improved by ourſelves. To ſubſiſt with comfort, requires ſome attention in men of every rank; and, on the contrary, by caſting all prudence and diſcretion aſide, they may render themſelves almoſt in any degree miſerable. Thus as far as we ſee of the œconomy of the divine govern-

ment,

ment, ſome diligence and care on our part is made a condition. And we generally experience ſuch effects from our good endeavours, as afford an encouragement to perſevere. We muſt continue to grow and increaſe in virtue, if we hope at laſt for perfect happineſs.

We find at preſent, our ſatisfaction is made to take its riſe partly from our inward ſentiments; that our enjoyment in any ſtation, to which we happen to be advanced, depends in ſome meaſure on the turn and temper of mind we bring along with us. It ſeems neceſſary then, according to the courſe God is pleaſed to appoint, that we firſt prepare ourſelves for a happier life, by cultivating and improving a proper diſpoſition. And thus we may the more readily believe, that when he brings us into an imperfect ſtate, but gives us at the ſame time a nature capable of ſo great improvement, it is with the gracious deſign and purpoſe of

beſtowing on us a better and more favourable ſituation, if we will but endeavour to make ourſelves in ſome ſort worthy of it.

However bad and imperfect a ſtate this world may ſeem, yet if we ſufficiently attend to our condition when we enter into it, we cannot think we were fit and qualified for a better. As far as we are able to judge, it is wiſely and perfectly accommodated to our circumſtances. We live not under a government, where rewards and puniſhments are accurately diſtributed; we muſt firſt grow to a proper maturity and become ripe for it, by ſhewing which it is we deſerve. Yet now juſtice is known to viſit us occaſionally, while we are only making out our ſeveral claims upon her: when their nature and degree is ſufficiently determined and ſettled, we may expect ſhe will appear and decide among us in full majeſty and form.

form.* Virtue has its comforts and advantages even here, where we are to be formed and trained up to it; and where it is neceſſary for this purpoſe, that difficulties and obſtructions ſhould lie in its way, and that it ſhould fail of meeting with its reward, and of producing always its due effect: what fruit then muſt it yield hereafter, when there will not be the like reaſon to oppoſe and check it; and when it ſhall be tranſplanted, as we may

* In Hume's Eſſay of a particular providence and a future ſtate, we are preſſed with the following query, "are there any marks of a diſtributive juſtice in the world? If you anſwer in the affirmative, I conclude, that ſince Juſtice here exerts itſelf, it is ſatisfied. If you reply in the negative, I conclude, that you have then no reaſon to aſcribe juſtice to the Gods. If you hold a medium betwixt affirmation and negation, by ſaying, that the juſtice of the Gods at preſent exerts itſelf in part, but not in its full extent; I anſwer, that you have no reaſon to give it any particular extent, but only ſo far as you ſee it at prefent exert itſelf." In the ſecond caſe that is put, we may diſown the premiſes: in the two others, we may deny the concluſion. Not but in the laſt caſe, as we ſhall attempt to ſhew in the 7th Sermon, the concluſion may be allowed, without affecting the queſtion of a future ſtate of rewards and puniſhments.

may ſuppoſe, out of a harſher into a more friendly climate?

It is by ſuch reflections, that the humble and well diſpoſed reconcile themſelves to the things of this life, and are even thankful for them. But we on the contrary are apt to murmur and repine, becauſe our ſituation is not ſo eaſy and agreeable as we could wiſh. How premature and prepoſterous are we in our deſires! We want to be made completely happy, before we have done any thing to deſerve it. *In due ſeaſon we ſhall reap, if we faint not.* Thus we ſuffer our folly and our pride to outſtrip the ſuggeſtions of modeſt reaſon. As often as we behold either virtue degraded or vice triumphant, we call out, in our impatience and indignation, on the Judge of the world to appear and adminiſter juſtice: though at the ſame time it is to be apprehended, his interpoſition would not as

yet

yet be proper, and that things are only preparing for his coming.

Thus the ſeeming irregularities and evils of this world, do not neceſſarily imply any real errour and defect in the adminiſtration of it; they admit of another, and that not an improbable ſolution. Even we with our ignorance, are able in ſome degree to perceive, how this life, whether it is to be called, a ſtate of diſcipline, or probation, or in general terms, an imperfect ſtate, is one however which conſtitutes a part, and that the firſt, in a ſcheme of moral government, which, having ſuch a creature as man for a ſubject, conſiſts of ſeveral parts, ſome preparatory to and proper to introduce others that follow.

It may be aſked, out of a wanton ſpirit of objecting, whether it would not have been better, that this ſcheme had

been abridged, by our being made completely perfect and happy all at once? We can come to no determination in this matter by means of our reaſoning, any further than by preſuming it would not have been better, ſince God has thought fit to decree otherwiſe. Were our underſtandings and experience much enlarged beyond their preſent bounds, we might be more able, perhaps, to judge, whether the ſyſtem of the univerſe is capable of improvement; and how far it is proper for ſuch a creature as man to hold any where a place in the creation. We muſt now content ourſelves, if our nature and ſituation, taken as we find them, appear reconcileable to a plan of moral government actually ſubſiſting.*

* It is aſked, in the Eſſay before cited, "what muſt a philoſopher think of thoſe vain reaſoners, who, inſtead of regarding the preſent life as the ſole object of their contemplation, ſo far reverſe the whole courſe of nature, as to render it merely a paſſage to ſomething further; a porch, which leads to a greater and vaſtly different building; a prologue, which ſerves only to introduce the piece, and give it more grace and propriety." By "ſo far

far reverſing the courſe of nature," ſeems here to be meant, making it ſo far inſignificant, ſo far null and void. Now the preſent life, which we hold to be a ſtate of probation only, and which therefore is not, or at leaſt ought not to be made, the ſole object of contemplation, is ſtill conſidered as ſomething highly intereſting and important. But more lies at the bottom of this objection, which will appear afterwards.

SER-

SERMON II.

On the moral nature with which man is endued.

Which ſhew the work of the law written in their hearts, their conſcience alſo bearing witneſs, and their thoughts the mean while accuſing or elſe excuſing one another.
ROM. ii. 15.

THE preſent and a future life muſt be thought to have a mutual dependence and reſpect, and we ſhall conceive of the one according to the light in which

which we view the other. If we look upon this world as a ſchool of diſcipline; the next will be regarded as a ſuperiour ſtate, where certain endowments are required as neceſſary qualifications: or if we conſider this world as a place of probation; the other will ſtand related to it as a place of rewards and puniſhments. We have ſeen how far theſe ſuppoſitions are credible from our ſituation and circumſtances. It remains for us, to examine what further evidence is to be collected from the teſtimony of our ſenſes and internal feelings; and to inquire how far it is probable, from our particular nature and conſtitution, that this life is to be ſucceeded by another, where rewards and puniſhments will be accurately diſtributed.

We are able to diſtinguiſh between right and wrong, good and evil: ſo that all actions appear not alike to us, ſeem not to be equal and indifferent; we approve

prove of ſome and condemn others. And what is it we are to infer from this moral diſcernment with which we are endued?

But before we make the inference, it may be proper to obviate the difficulties ſome might think of throwing in the way. We find there are men, from an extreme wickedneſs or ignorance, who commit ſin without remorſe; without any apprehenſion and dread of puniſhment, or even ſenſe of ſhame. Here then, we ſhall be told, there are no marks of any moral diſcernment, no traces of a conſcience diſcernible at all. But allowing there is ſuch a thing as conſcience in the world, it may be ſaid to operate in a precarious, uncertain manner; ſince men are to be found, in ſome ages and countries, who follow thoſe actions as virtues, which others ſhun as vices. Or allowing laſtly, that our ſenſe of right and wrong is in a certain meaſure

ſure regular and uniform in its ſuggeſtions, yet this, ſome perhaps would perſuade us, is to be accounted for from education and habit; who may argue, it is no wonder that diſcipline ſhould bring us to an agreement in our ſentiments, and be attended with effects alike and ſimilar, when it has ever been applied by political men to ſerve one and the ſame end, the intereſts of government: and thus, ſome may be for eluding the concluſion we are willing to draw, by repreſenting our knowledge of good and evil, as a creature of policy; and not as derived from any original impreſſions in our frame, which might lead to a diſcovery of the purpoſe of our Maker.

It is indeed to be granted, that our ſenſe of right and wrong is unable to ſhew itſelf to advantage, when deprived of the aſſiſtance of a good education; that under the influence of a bad and corrupt one, it may exert itſelf erroneouſly; and that

that poſſibly in ſome caſes, it may not even exert itſelf at all, as where men, through inveterate habits or an exceſſive ignorance, are quite loſt to any feeling. Yet while we allow all this of our moral, the like, we muſt remember, holds alſo true of our intellectual faculties, which it is confeſſed are of divine original.

For they are ſuch as receive improvement from education: and yet we find that men, even after their underſtandings are cultivated and improved, are wont to think differently and entertain oppoſite opinions on the ſame ſubject. Our reaſon then is liable to the imputation of contrariety. It is various in its appearances; there it is ſeen to ſhine in its pureſt luſtre, while here we only diſcover ſome faint glimmerings: and yet thoſe, who eclipſe others by their greater light of underſtanding, have not always a like ſuperiority of diſcernment in matters of common behaviour and duty. There

ſeems

ſeems to be, at leaſt, as great a diſpro-portion and diſagreement in men's reaſon, which we allow to be the gift of God, and given us too for our direction, as there is in their ſenſe of right and wrong. Our rational and moral endowments ſtand on a like footing, and have equal pretenſions to be deemed native and unartificial.

In both caſes we derive ſome helps from inſtruction: but this only ſhews, that we are fitted by nature to receive improvement from it; otherwiſe it could not be applied with any effect. Our no-tions then of right and wrong cannot be called entirely a matter of human inven-tion, in which the Author of our being has no concern: if he does not actually implant them, he at leaſt furniſhes the ſtock on which they are ingrafted; if the notions themſelves are acquired, the ca-pacity to learn them we muſt allow to be natural; which is enough for our purpoſe, and affords a foundation ſuf-

ficient

ficient for the concluſion we want to eſtabliſh.

The whole to be collected from this view of ourſelves is, that God has not thought fit to beſtow on us a nature abſolutely perfect, nor yet ſuch as can be brought to its ſtated pitch of perfection without culture. However our faculties, confined as they are to limits and conditions, diſtinguiſh us from the reſt of the animal creation; ſo much indeed, as plainly to point out the intention of our Maker. It is impoſſible for a brute, by all the powers of education or efforts of policy, to be taught, in the manner we are, the exerciſe of reaſon, and to acquire a ſenſe of diſcriminating between ſeveral actions. And is it in vain, that we are formed differently from other creatures, which are blind, and cannot attain to the moral diſcernment we poſſeſs? Has not the wiſe Contriver of nature an end in all his appointments? He means no doubt to judge

us by the law, which he has made us in ſo eminent a degree capable of perceiving.

Now indeed, the good ſometimes have to ſtruggle with diſappointments and afflictions, while the wicked proſper and flouriſh. This world preſents us with a ſcene that is irregular. Yet in moſt caſes, whatever their real condition may be, men are uſually told, by ſomething that ſpeaks from within, how they deſerve at leaſt to be treated. We have a conſciouſneſs either of good or ill deſert. Thus God, whom ſome chooſe to make a ſingular being, of whom nothing can be known, has not left himſelf without a witneſs, while our thoughts accuſe or elſe excuſe us. He has planted in our breaſts a monitor, a repreſentative of himſelf, not only to direct us in our behaviour, but to forewarn us of what we have to expect. We know from experience what the preſent ſtate is; and let thoſe hopes and fears, which operate with

men almoſt univerſally, and at times ſo forcibly, according as their minds are poſſeſſed with a conſcious ſenſe of guilt or virtue, declare to us the general tenour of the ſtate which is to follow.

Theſe hopes and fears concerning a life to come, are peculiar to ourſelves; are ſuch as other animals are void of, ſuch indeed as it is not poſſible to infuſe into them by any art or ſtudy. They cannot be taught to look forward to ſo great a diſtance: they are incapable of conſidering and of being affected with the moral quality of actions. We caſt our eyes towards the next world, and behold it with a ſecret uneaſineſs or complacency, according as we ſtand acquitted or convicted of guilt to our own hearts. Other creatures are blind to the view of an hereafter, are callous and dead to thoſe forebodings, which that proſpect naturally awakens in a conſcious mind. This conſtitutes ſo eſſential a difference between

a man and a brute, as to ſhew ſufficiently the deſtination of their natures, and point out the ſeveral ends allotted to each. For us, who have a ſenſe of duty, a perception of the law and obligation of virtue; who poſſeſs the feelings of good and bad deſert; a ſtate of rewards and puniſhments, in which we already take an intereſt, is, we may believe, really intended: but this can hardly be ſuppoſed of thoſe creatures, which are not touched with a ſenſe of duty; which have not our preſages of thought; and are not, like us, apprehenſive of deſerving well or ill, from complying with or tranſgreſſing any rules of virtue and morality.

We are diſtinguiſhed by capacities and powers of our own. God has given us certain talents, which exalt us above his other works, which ennoble us; and he will be ſure to examine, how far we have availed ourſelves of them, and whether we have applied them to a proper uſe. Let brutes,

brutes, that have no underſtanding, periſh, and ſink into nothing: for man it is appointed to riſe again from the grave to render an account of his deeds.

It is true, there are ſome, through a natural defect or poſſibly other accidental cauſes, who labour all their lives unavoidably under ignorance: others again are cut off early, before they come to the knowledge of good and evil. Touching thoſe inſtances, and ſo far as any help is to be borrowed from the preſent argument, we may ſeem deſtitute of a proof of a future ſtate, either of rewards or puniſhments; and might be at a loſs perhaps what to decide. With regard to the reſt of mankind; they are in ſuch a ſituation, that they come to the uſe of their reaſon, and learn to diſtinguiſh in ſome meaſure between right and wrong, almoſt of courſe. But beſides; while we thus arrive at the knowledge of a moral law, whether we are much ſollicitous to

underſtand it or not, we are under a neceſſity of ſhewing how far we are willing to conform to it: for it is impoſſible in this caſe to preſerve ourſelves in a ſtate of abſolute indifference. We become then, independently of our own choice, reſponſible for our conduct: and ought we not to believe, ſince God ſo far makes us accountable beings, that he intends to deal with us as ſuch; and that we muſt be brought at ſome time or other to appear before him in judgement?

At firſt our reaſon and ſenſe of right and wrong are not diſcernible. By degrees, as we advance forward in life, and come to enter upon the ſcene of buſineſs, when our other affections and paſſions are going to be called forth, they alſo begin to diſcover themſelves. And thus they appear at a proper time; offer themſelves ſeaſonably as guides: and they are not mere guides of human device, but ſpeak to us with a divine authority. God how-

however, in the ordinary courſe of his government, interferes no otherwiſe, than by conveying to us through our faculties an intimation of his pleaſure. It would be too awful a check upon the will, were his Juſtice always to preſent herſelf before us, ready armed to take vengeance, when we are about to commit a guilty action. She retires to ſome diſtance, leaving us for a while to our own diſcretion. Thus we are preparing for a ſtate of rewards and puniſhments. At the firſt we were unfit for it; being incapable of thought and reflection, and void of all merit and demerit. By degrees, we both learn in ſome meaſure to comprehend the law of juſtice, and at the ſame time grow liable to it: and as we become at laſt, in every reſpect, proper ſubjects for a government, in which every man ſhall receive his own reward, it is to be expected that hereafter we muſt be conſigned to ſuch an one; where we ſhall not only, by means of our underſtand-

ing, be qualified in ſome ſort to be witneſſes of God's righteous judgements, but alſo, from our paſt behaviour, for which we are anſwerable, be made to have an intereſt in his deciſions.

We are to infer the purpoſe of our Maker, from a certain congruity and fitneſs diſcoverable in us; a fitneſs, we were not at the firſt poſſeſſed of, we only acquire it here: and therefore we are not brought now into a ſtate of rewards and puniſhments; God muſt be underſtood to have it in reſerve for us.

It ſcarce can be thought impoſſible for us to judge beforehand, whether it be the will of the Deity or not to call us to an account, and to place us under a government where juſtice is to be duly executed; from a pretence, that the intentions of ſo ſingular a being lie remote from knowledge. He himſelf informs us of his intentions, by the impreſſions he has

has ſtamped on our minds. He ſpeaks to us by the voice of our conſcience; forewarns us of a judgement to come, by imprinting on our hearts a ſenſe of good or ill deſert. He makes a revelation of his decree in the law of our conſtitution and frame, which does not merely point out to us an hereafter, but ſuggeſts the form of our future condition. We may learn the deſtiny that awaits us by conſulting the genius of our nature.

To maintain, that the end which God propoſes in his works in any inſtance, is not to be diſcovered from our notions of their fitneſs for a particular purpoſe; and that we can no where come within the reach of his deſigns, by our ways of thinking and reaſoning; would be the height of extravagance, and ſcepticiſm in an extreme. The argument ſurely from final cauſes, is to be admitted in ſome caſes; it offers itſelf on the preſent occaſion, and ſeems to bring along with it an evidence not inconſiderable.

SER-

SERMON III.

On a future ſtate of rewards and puniſhments, as inferred from the works of a ſupreme Being.

How unſearchable are his judgements, and his ways paſt finding out! ROM. xi. 33.

THESE words muſt not be ſuppoſed to extend to all caſes, and be underſtood to mean, that the counſels of God are univerſally unſearchable, and lie out of the reach of our knowledge; ſo that we cannot ſatisfy ourſelves even of the

the truth of a future judgement, where we are to give an account of our behaviour, though it concerns us ſo much to be rightly informed. That they are not to be taken in ſo ſtrict a ſenſe, will appear from other paſſages of St. Paul in this ſame Epiſtle, as where he tells us, that the Gentile world, to whom God had not made a particular revelation of his will, could not however be ignorant, that their wickedneſs and idolatry would expoſe them to the ſad effects of his diſpleaſure, and bring down his judgements upon them. *The wrath of God is revealed from heaven againſt all ungodlineſs and unrighteouſneſs of men, who hold the truth in unrighteouſneſs; becauſe that which may be known of God is manifeſt in them; for God hath ſhewed it unto them. For the inviſible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly ſeen, being underſtood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; ſo that they are without excuſe. Becauſe that when they knew God, they glo-*

rified

rified him not as God, but became vain in their imaginations: profeſſing themſelves wiſe they became fools: and changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man. And as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do thoſe things which are not convenient. Who knowing the judgement of God, that they which commit ſuch things are worthy of death, not only do the ſame, but have pleaſure in them that do them.

Here the Apoſtle affirms, that if the Gentiles did not ſee the truth, the reaſon muſt be that they ſhut their eyes againſt it; that being blinded by a wilful obſtinacy and perverſeneſs, God gave them over to a reprobate mind: that had they come prepared with a proper diſpoſition, and with ſingleneſs of heart, without a wrong bias upon them from their vanity, their prejudices and corrupt affections, they might have attained to the knowledge of

of God, by the light of nature, by means of his works, and the things he has created; and that the diſcovery he makes of his attributes and of his will and purpoſe, is ſo clear and expreſs, as to render all ignorance without excuſe.

Great pains and much ingenuity have been uſed of late, to perplex and involve in difficulty, what is underſtood to be a plain matter. Some go about to eſtabliſh univerſal doubt and uncertainty: as if they were deſirous, to have the words of the text interpreted in the ſtrict literal ſenſe, in their utmoſt rigour of expreſſion. They contend, we are not at liberty to conclude thus much of the ſupreme Being, that he has an intention to bring us to a future trial. And I ſhall here conſider, as far as I am able to underſtand it, the very ſingular reaſoning on which their opinion is grounded. It is to be met with in an Eſſay of a late Author concerning a future ſtate, where he diſcuſſes the

the ſubject of cauſe and effect. He grants, that the being of a God is to be proved from the exiſtence and order of the univerſe; but ſeems willing only to allow of the argument, that he may inſtruct us in the right uſe and conduct of it, and prevent any errours and abuſe.

He begins with ſaying, "that the cauſe muſt be proportioned to the effect." This may be granted: it is added, "and if we exactly proportion it, we ſhall never find in it any qualities that point farther, or afford an inference concerning any other deſign or performance." We are often told of the impropriety, "firſt of mounting upwards from the effect to the cauſe, and then deſcending downwards, to infer any new effect from that cauſe." Now this, which perhaps may not appear at the firſt altogether clear and intelligible, is the hinge, on which much of the ſcepticiſm we there meet with principally turns. The meaning of it ſeems

to

to be, in plain terms, that it is contrary to the rules of logic, to believe in a future ſtate of rewards and puniſhments. The reaſon of this poſition is explained in theſe words; "In works of human art and contrivance, 'tis allowable to advance from the effect to the cauſe, and returning back from the cauſe, form new inferences concerning the effect, and examine the alterations, which it has probably undergone, or may ſtill undergo. But what is the foundation of this method of reaſoning? Plainly this, that man is a being, whom we know by experience, whoſe motives and deſigns we are acquainted with, and whoſe projects and inclinations have a certain connexion and coherence, according to the law which nature has eſtabliſhed for the government of ſuch a creature. When therefore we find, that any work has proceeded from the ſkill and induſtry of man, as we are otherwiſe acquainted with the nature of the animal, we can draw a hundred inferences

ferences concerning what may be expected from him. The caſe is not the ſame with our reaſonings from the works of nature. The Deity is known to us only by his productions, and is a ſingle Being in the univerſe, not comprehended under any ſpecies or genus, from whoſe experienced attributes or qualities, we can, by analogy, infer any attribute or quality in him."

What a diſplay of refined phraſeology is every where made in the Eſſay! all tending to prove, it is impoſſible for us to know, whether God, who has brought us into this world, and made us reaſonable creatures, will proceed in the next to bring us to an account. It ſeems all the while to be forgot, that he is a Being who ſtands in a peculiar relation to us, that of our Maker. We derive from him our nature, and all the good we enjoy or can expect: and let this ſupply the want of any analogy.

We are endued with a moral diſcernment; a ſenſe to diſtinguiſh between right and wrong, good and evil, which every where approves or condemns. And theſe faculties, which thus paſs ſentence on all occaſions, carry with them evident marks of authority; they are the governing principles of our frame, which are to control our other affections, and guide the whole tenour of our conduct. And is it to be believed, that He, who endues us with the power to perceive and underſtand the laws of virtue and morality; to feel their obligation and force; and to receive them as the ſovereign rule of our conduct; can be indifferently diſpoſed to virtue himſelf? The law written and engraven in our hearts, declares ſufficiently what he himſelf approves or condemns.

Can it be credible, that the Author of our being endues us with an underſtanding ſo far in vain, as to be of no uſe and aſſiſt-

aſſiſtance to us in meditating on his government, and in coming to the leaſt knowledge of his intentions, at the ſame time that we abſolutely depend upon him for our happineſs? This cannot well be imagined. He muſt be underſtood to have given us our reaſon, to inform us of his will, to teach us our duty, and the conſequences we are to apprehend from a neglect of it.

Hence it is, that divines think they may lawfully deduce from the Cauſe a new effect; and draw an inference concerning a further deſign and performance. They are, according to our author, "thoſe vain reaſoners, who conſider this life as a porch, leading to a vaſtly different and ſuperiour building." And it cannot but be ſome ſurprize, eſpecially to men of humble well diſpoſed minds, to hear themſelves accuſed of raſhneſs for preſuming to think, that God intends hereafter to puniſh or reward us for our good or bad

behaviour. Alas! does not the preſumption reſt rather with thoſe, who in this matter affect uncertainty and ignorance? A future ſtate of rewards and puniſhments cannot, it is true, be diſcovered to the "full in the effects now exiſting;" it appears, however, with an evidence not to be ſlighted.

But it is in vain, we are told, to think of inquiring into the ſchemes of ſo ſingular a Being, while we are not poſſeſſed of the neceſſary means of inveſtigation: for we are not here acquainted, as we are in the caſe of human projects, "with the eſtabliſhed law of coherence, and the rule of deſign."

This, we muſt allow, is true in general; but is ſcarce to be admitted in this particular inſtance. The ſcheme we examine, is not not made up of a great number of parts, depending one on another in a ſeries: it conſiſts only of two;

a trial

a trial and a ſubſequent reward and puniſhment: and was the former part once eſtabliſhed with any degree of certainty, the connexion between them appears ſo eaſy and natural that the other part would ſeem to be implied, and almoſt to follow of courſe.

At preſent, we find, our advancement and ſucceſs in life, though not always, is often made the reward of a diſcreet and prudent conduct; is to be earned by the exertion of honeſt and virtuous endeavours. But what is moſt eſſential in this caſe, our real enjoyment however, our true peace and comfort in our ſtation, whatever it be, is more ſteadily connected with a laudable induſtry: with the care we take in regulating our paſſions; and in cultivating a proper turn of thought, a good habit and diſpoſition of mind. And this obtains ſo very remarkably in the ordinary courſe of affairs, as to make it ſeem highly probable, that, according

to the law and appointment of the Diſpoſer of all events, future as well as preſent, our well-being hereafter is to depend on our behaviour, and the improvement we make here.

When we conſider our ſtate and condition, that now we are only in the firſt ſtage of our exiſtence, and were originally undeſerving either of abſolute happineſs or miſery; that our moral and intellectual faculties are to be formed; that it is neceſſary our diſpoſitions and character ſhould diſcover themſelves, and our behaviour be made manifeſt and apparent; we poſſibly may think, that our preſent ſituation, with the degree of irregularity and evils which attend it, is wiſely and perfectly ſuited and accommodated to us: and thus we may conclude, that afterwards in the following ſtage, we ſhall alſo be treated as our circumſtances require. As a proper ſtation ſeems to be aſſigned us here, we may infer an equal fitneſs of arrange-

arragement hereafter. The law of deſign then, as far as we can underſtand it, leads to a future diſtribution of rewards and puniſhments.

We ſhall be brought to the ſame concluſion, by conſidering how we are formed, and what kind of creatures we are made. When we turn our view inwardly upon ourſelves, and examine the faculties and endowments by which we are diſtinguiſhed, we find ourſelves ſtill more convinced of a future ſtate of rewards and puniſhments: it offers itſelf to us with a peculiar force of evidence; an evidence ſeemingly not to be reſiſted, unleſs we can perſuade ourſelves, that we are really of a nature not different from or ſuperiour to that of brute creatures. The conſciouſneſs of good and bad deſert, which appears no where in any other animal as it does in man, informs us of what we have to expect from our Maker; and in-

timates plainly to us, the rule of coherence in his purpoſes.

An obſerver of the works of nature, who reflects at the ſame time, that the God who created them, has alſo made him the creature he is, will find himſelf diſpoſed, notwithſtanding they appear extraordinary and wonderful, to examine into their deſign; but more eſpecially he muſt be deſirous of knowing the end of his own being. And he cannot but think himſelf authorized to make the enquiry: for otherwiſe, why can his underſtanding be given him? As he begins with his reſearch, wherever he obſerves in nature things adapted to certain ends, he will imagine he may lawfully conclude, that thoſe ends are really deſigned and meant. Thus he will believe, for inſtance, that his eyes are given him with the intent that he may ſee and diſtinguiſh objects: and while he yields his aſſent to this, and

ſeveral

ſeveral other truths of a like kind, he will not be made to ſtagger in his faith, though it be told him, he reaſons on the deſigns of a ſingular being. Now he purſues no other than a like method of reaſoning, when he is led to infer, from a fitneſs in our moral nature, that we are now training up and are intended for a ſtate of rewards and puniſhments.

The relation the Deity bears to us as a Creator, implies other relations, as that of Governour or Judge, who rules his people, and adminiſters laws to his ſubjects. The laws preſcribed to us, are thoſe of virtue and morality: and can we doubt any longer of the rule, by which the divine meaſures are regulated; or can we expect hereafter to eſcape puniſhment, if we ſhew ourſelves undutiful and diſobedient?

The relation we ſtand in to the ſupreme Being, muſt be overlooked or neglected,

glected, when it is ſaid, we here are in want of ſome analogy or other, from whence we may infer any attribute and quality in him; or be led to any probable conjecture of his future intentions.

Some would infer the moral from the natural attributes of the Deity: and the argument ſeems to carry with it a degree of conviction. Thus, on common occaſions, when we are debating on the conduct of a perſon, with whoſe character we are unacquainted, in a matter where, as far as appears, he can have no intereſt to ſerve, no paſſion nor ſo much as a vanity to gratify, we are apt to conclude, that he will there follow the dictates of unbiaſſed reaſon; that a regard to right will neceſſarily prevail, where there is no inducement to act wrong. This example, though infinitely unworthy of the ſubject to which it is applied, may ſuffice to ſhew, that what we are willing to ſuppoſe of men in ſome caſes, is to be believed

believed of God in all. The power and wiſdom exerted by him in the works of the creation, appear to be all ſufficient in themſelves; and imply, according to our notions, a rectitude of will: they are their own pledges; enſure to us a proper direction, in proſecuting the purpoſes of a conſummate benevolence and juſtice. Here then we aſcribe certain moral attributes and qualities to the ſupreme Being, by a ſpecies of analogy; by arguing from beings, not indeed included in the ſame claſs.

Our author goes on to obſerve, "that the great ſource of our miſtake in this ſubject is, that we tacitly conſider ourſelves as in the place of the ſupreme Being, and conclude, that he will, on every occaſion, obſerve the ſame conduct, which we ourſelves, in his ſituation, would have embraced as reaſonable and eligible. But beſides that the ordinary courſe of nature may convince us, that almoſt every thing

is regulated by principles and maxims very different from ours; beſides this, I ſay, it muſt evidently appear contrary to all rules of analogy, to reaſon from the intentions and projects of men, to thoſe of a Being ſo different and ſo much ſuperiour."

It muſt be granted, that our knowledge of the courſe of nature is very imperfect. We think, however, that in the conduct of ſeveral parts of it, we can perceive a fitneſs and wiſdom; can diſcern the marks of a moſt wonderful power and intelligence. And all the diſcoveries and improvements in ſcience and knowledge, which men are continually making in a courſe of ages, tend not to abate but to confirm and heighten this opinion. The deſigns of the Author of nature are found to be more beautiful and perfect, the more they are examined, and the better they are underſtood: ſo then the natural and true inference ſeems to be, that thoſe

mea-

meaſures of the ſupreme Being, which appear leſs juſt and regular, are ſuch as would approve themſelves to the underſtanding, were we in any degree capable of knowing all the principles and maxims by which they are directed. This we may own to be, at leaſt, very poſſible, that in the wide field of nature, in the unbounded ſphere of the univerſe, there may be a reſpect to objects and ends, which come not within our view; of which at preſent we have not the leaſt glimpſe or fainteſt perception.

In having this general perſuaſion, that the ends of the ſupreme Being are every where right and juſt; it will by no means follow, we at the ſame time conſider ourſelves capable of deciding on the particular ways by which it is proper thoſe ends ſhould be accompliſhed. We ſhould be guilty of great folly and extravagance, or rather, of a palpable abſurdity and contradiction, in conceiving that a Being, ſo very

very different and ſuperiour, muſt purſue on every occaſion "thoſe meaſures, which we may think fit and eligible." And the queſtion is, whether we ſhould not err in the oppoſite extreme, by ſuppoſing ourſelves incapable of coming to the leaſt knowledge of his will; and of forming any judgement of his intentions, even where we are immediately concerned, and our moſt eſſential intereſts depending? Is it to ſo little purpoſe God endues us with our reaſon? It was meant to aſſiſt and inform us in ſome degree: and if in the one caſe we exalt it above the lawful limit; in the other, we degrade it lower than it is intended. We are guilty of a like arrogance and impiety, whether we pretend to comprehend all things, or affect not to know any thing. A medium is to be obſerved: a boundary is to be fixed ſomewhere or other.

Scepticiſm may be purſued, till it offers violence to common ſenſe. We ſurely may

may be allowed to truſt ſo far our reaſon and the feelings of our mind, as to believe it poſſible for them in ſome caſes to inform us right.

Of this we may reſt aſſured, that God is righteous, and will be the rewarder of thoſe who follow after righteouſneſs. This is a truth which it concerns us to know as moral agents; and is neceſſary to us in the regulation of our conduct: and ſuch truths, it may well be ſuppoſed, we are able to attain to by the help of thoſe faculties, which God, on whom we are to rely for all poſſible good, has given us for our information. The light of nature may be allowed to clear up our duty to us, and make it ſufficiently plain. It will enable us to diſcover our road, and even to ſee forward to the end of our journey; though not to look much around us, ſo as to have any wide proſpect of the country through which we travel.

When,

When, out of a love of novelty and refinement, men carry their notions to an extreme, in oppoſition to the dictates of plain ſenſe, and the genuine feelings of the mind, they may ſometimes be able, by ſtating their opinions in terms of a recondite philoſophy, to puzzle and perplex; but will ſeldom ſatisfy and convince. We cannot be made to acquieſce in the ſceptical maxim inculcated in the Eſſay, if we are to underſtand it in the full latitude and extent: it is to be received ſurely with ſome kind of limitation and reſerve.

Our creed is, the thoughts of God are unſearchable; but we are willing to make ſome exceptions: firſt as to a future ſtate of rewards and puniſhments, which is likewiſe an article of our faith; and next as to certain matters of practice or duty; in both of which caſes, the will and deſign of God appears clear and evident. As to the reſt; mere unaſſiſted reaſon leaves

leaves us in ignorance. Yet with reſpect to the divine counſels which are unſearchable, we are prompted by the voice of nature to conclude thus much, that they are perfectly juſt and good; though we cannot comprehend diſtinctly, how far or in what particular manner.

SERMON IV.

On the uſe and beauty of general laws in the natural world.

This is an evil among all things that are done under the ſun, that there is one event unto all. ECCLES. ix. 3.

THE reſult of the inquiry we have hitherto been making is, that the expectation of ſucceeding hereafter to a happier life, is ſuch as we may reaſonably entertain, provided we fail not through our miſconduct, and are not the authors

of our own diſappointment. But we will proceed to take a further account of our ſituation, and to view certain parts of it more minutely: in order, by a more accurate ſurvey of this ſtate, to open, if poſſible, a clearer proſpect into the next, and remove the obſtructions ſome are ſtudious to throw in the way. And firſt, we will begin with conſidering the general laws by which we are governed. A particular examination of them is the more neceſſary, becauſe upon them are founded ſome of the main objections, which are uſually made to a future ſtate of rewards and puniſhments.

They have long been complained of as the principal cauſe of the irregularity and diſorders of life. Through them is this *evil among all things that are done under the ſun, that there is one event unto all.* But how is the grievance to be removed? Is it fit the laws of gravity, or rather of nature at large, ſhould be ſuſpended or varied, as often

often as it ſuits the convenience of parcular men? Shall God cauſe the ſun to ſhine on the righteous alone? Are their fields only to be made moiſt with the drops of rain, and bleſſed with an increaſe? Muſt froſt and ſtorms of hail and wind, either not approach their vineyard, or in ſuch a manner as to do no injury; and exert all their fury and malice in blaſting the labours of the wicked? By this rule different men, who live in the ſame neighbourhood and even family, are to be governed each by laws of their own, according to the quality and degree of their moral character: and we ſhould behold in one and the ſame place, a climate, a ſcene of things, a courſe of nature, at total variance with itſelf. It is impoſſible for us to conceive the diſorder and confuſion, which would be occaſioned by this way of rectifying, what is called, the bad and irregular appearances in the government of the world.

Our Saviour teaches, in one of his parables, that this life is not the ſeaſon for making a due diſtinction between the godly and the wicked. The tares, he ſays, muſt not be gathered as yet, leſt the wheat be rooted up with them. *Let both grow until the harveſt: and in the time of harveſt I will ſay to the reapers, gather ye together firſt the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them: but gather the wheat into my barn.* He gives this as a familiar illuſtration of the harm and miſchief of inflicting on the guilty the puniſhment they deſerve. No evil can be brought upon them which will not extend further, and equally affect thoſe who are connected with them, their friends, their family, and children. The tares muſt be ſuffered to ſpring up with the wheat; it is fit, that good men and bad be allowed for the preſent to partake alike of the common benefits of life.

Men of piety and religion, obſerving how *all things come alike to all*, will find

ſupport and comfort in the Word of God, where it is declared, that *he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteouſneſs*; and then the diſorders and irregularities, ſo apt to alarm and perplex us, will be ſet to right and corrected. But ſhall we alſo have recourſe to our reaſon as well as Scripture, and conſider whether any notions, we are able to form of propriety and convenience, can be of ſome help in bringing us to acquieſce in the preſent condition of the world?

It ſeems fit no doubt, that the bad ſhould be puniſhed for their tranſgreſſion, and the good rewarded for their obedience: but does it appear abſolutely neceſſary, that this ſhould be done now immediately? On the contrary we are taught to perceive, that the execution of juſtice may be deferred more commodiouſly to another ſeaſon. Let things then continue for their allotted time in the preſent ſtate. Let general laws have their

courſe: they are not under the direction of a blind chance, but a ſupreme deſign.*

The beauty and harmony, we ſee and ſo much admire in the univerſe, is owing every where to the uniform operation and influence of its laws. Hence ariſes the conſtant viciſſitude of day and night; the regular return of the ſeveral ſeaſons of the year; the order in the motions of the heavenly bodies, which have continued ſo long to perform their revolutions, each in the ſame period of time, and all according to a certain rule.

We

* "The obſtinate and intractable qualities of matter, we are told, or the obſervance of general laws, or ſome ſuch reaſon is the ſole cauſe, which controlled the power and benevolence of Jupiter, and obliged him to create mankind and every ſenſible creature, ſo imperfect and ſo unhappy. Theſe attributes then are, it ſeems, beforehand taken for granted, in their greateſt latitude." Vid. Eſſay, &c. General laws are conceived to be by the appointment of the Governour of the world, not out of neceſſity but choice; and even to afford a proof of his benevolence and juſtice: according to this idea, thoſe attributes are not taken for granted.

We find, both in plants and animals, how all, in their ſeveral kinds, are derived one from another according to fixed laws, each inheriting the make and form, the general nature and properties of its predeceſſor; and this through the ſeries of an endleſs genealogy. Not but the ſeveral individuals of one and the ſame kind, as we may obſerve more eſpecially of our own ſpecies, have certain traits peculiar to each, by which they may be diſtinguiſhed and known. Yet, which ſhews the delicacy with which the divine Artiſt varies his ſkill, while they are made to differ ſenſibly from one another, they all agree in a common reſemblance, neceſſary to conſtitute them of one and the ſame claſs; and thus, notwithſtanding they depart, as it were, from each other by ſo many different paths, they walk every one within their proper bounds: by ſuch a wonderful œconomy are the ſeveral orders of creatures kept for ever ſeparate and diſtinct!

We

We may conſider the laws of nature, not only as acting uniformly in a number of ſucceſſive inſtances, and continuing of force for a length of time; but alſo as ſpreading through a wide compaſs, and ſtretching out into a length of ſpace: in both ways they convey to us an idea of their univerſality and extent. Thus there are certain laws of matter which reach far, and unite the moſt diſtant parts into one ſyſtem; there are certain laws common to animals, though moving in their ſeveral elements, and differing in various reſpects in their form and nature: this ſtrikes us with an appearance of order and method, and ſhews that things are digeſted into one plan of government.

But beſides the regularity and beauty reſulting from general laws, we may alſo obſerve their uſe and importance. In the common courſe of nature, where we are ſo much concerned, we find that events follow one another in order; that like effects

effects are always to be produced in like ways. By this means the rules, which once have been diſcovered, continue ever to be of uſe, and ſerve to direct us in the ſeveral occaſions of life. Were it not a matter made familiar by conſtant experience, it would ſeem wonderful that a grain of corn, when caſt into the ground, ſhould multiply and yield ſo large an increaſe, as to become ſixty or an hundred fold. But having found this to happen in a few inſtances, we can have recourſe ever after to the ſame expedient, not doubting of its ſucceſs, notwithſtanding that the means we uſe are ſo very diſproportionate to the end.

We are intereſted in the nature and qualities of things; this renders us diligent and attentive in learning them: but it is the regularity with which bodies operate on us and on one another, that ſtamps on every obſervation we are able

to

to make a laſting value. It is thus that we are taught the uſe of certain ſorts of diet, and to expect nouriſhment from them. Not that we can diſcern diſtinctly how food affects our bodies, and contributes to their growth; trace minutely the ways, by which it adminiſters health and vigour. This is one of the wonders of nature, where the fact is clear, and ſuch as we can always depend upon; but the manner in which it is performed is dark and myſterious. It is by a like magic, that we are delighted with the reliſh of certain fruits, the fragrance of certain flowers. We are kept alive and ſupported, receive pleaſure and pain, by an appointment wholly latent and inexplicable. We are liable, from accidents and the condition of mortality, to various infirmities and diſorders, which are to be removed or alleviated by the help of medicines; but we cannot explain how they perform their cures; we only know that they

they have been found to be of uſe, and that on like occaſions they may be applied with like ſucceſs.

Thus things go on and work in one conſtant manner and tract: and to this we owe the diſcovery of the arts of life, and the comfort of our ſubſiſtence. Was the conſtitution of the world fluctuating and variable, we could have no ſecurity that an experiment, which we have been ſo fortunate as to make in one inſtance, would ſucceed and be attended with a like effect in any future trial: and we ſhould live in a ſtate of perpetual anxiety and diſtraction; be for ever engaged in a wearyſome purſuit of knowledge, which if at any time obtained, we ſhould have the mortification to think, muſt ſoon again become uſeleſs. But as nature is at unity with herſelf, a diſcovery once made, is made for ever. As ſhe has all along maintained a ſameneſs of character, men have been able, in a courſe of time, to advance

advance to a conſiderable degree of intimacy with it. But we could not have made the progreſs, had ſhe ſhewn herſelf different to different people: for then the labours and ſtudy of any certain ſet of men, would have been of no uſe and ſignificancy, except to thoſe of their own particular claſs; and we could not have multiplied our diſcoveries in the manner we have, by availing ourſelves univerſally of each other's experience.

Chance, curioſity and deſign, operating through a ſucceſſion of ſo many ages, and we ought perhaps to add, a revelation made in ſome of the earlieſt and rudeſt, have all contributed to introduce the ſeveral arts of life. But that which makes them a treaſure ſo much worth the keeping, is our living under general laws, ſuch as act in every place and time uniformly and in a like manner. And this conſtancy with which nature adheres to her rules, is what all underſtand, the ignorant as well

well as the learned. The Plowman relies on certain effects of her power with as much confidence as the Philoſopher. He purſues his daily taſk with cheerfulneſs: and while he expects to reap, after a ſtated interval, the cuſtomary fruits of his labour, he ſhews the ſenſe he entertains of the regularity ſubſiſting in the conſtitution and government of the world. So does the Mariner, who ſteers his way by the ſtars in the unſtable element of the ſea. He preſumes at leaſt on their keeping themſelves fixed in one certain, unalterable order; and he truſts to them, as to a ſignal hung out in the heavens, to direct him in his courſe.

General laws then have both their beauty and uſe in the natural world: and that we may be reconciled to them the more, it remains for us to conſider, whether the ſame is not alſo true of the moral world.

SERMON V.

On the uſe and beauty of general laws in the moral world.

This is an evil among all things that are done under the ſun, that there is one event unto all. ECCLES. ix. 3.

WE come now to conſider the moral uſe and beauty of general laws. Were they to ceaſe, and particular laws to take place inſtead of them, which ſhould be adjuſted exactly to every man's private character, regulated in ſuch a

manner by our ſeveral views and motives, that we ſhould conſtantly meet with ſucceſs or diſappointment, with reward or puniſhment, according as our deſigns were honeſt or diſhoneſt, and our deeds good or evil; this might be the means indeed of bringing us to a compliance with our duty, but it would be at the expenſe of our freedom. The courſe we ought to take would be abſolutely forced upon us, if juſtice ſtood ready always at hand, not only to ſhew us the true path, but to chaſtiſe and correct, or encourage and reward us, according as we either complied with or diſobeyed her directions.

Was virtue conſtantly attended with proſperity and happineſs in this life, and vice, on the contrary, ſure to yield nothing but diſtreſs and miſery, all would be diſpoſed, either from inclination or intereſt, to follow that which is right; and be made to unite in their practice, how-

however they might be ſuppoſed to vary in principle. Thus the man of ambition or pleaſure, who ſhould perceive he could promote his ſchemes, and come to the enjoyment of his wiſhes, no otherwiſe than by behaving well, would agree, with the man of real integrity, in thinking himſelf every where bound to a punctual obſervance of the rules of honour and morality. We ſcarce indeed can conceive it poſſible in this caſe, for men to differ at all in their principles. They would neceſſarily be moulded into the ſame diſpoſition and temper, were they trained up from their infancy in a ſtate, where there is but one ſingle way that leads to any good; and where an irregular wiſh or deſire, if it ſhould happen ever to be formed, would ſcarce be able to gratify itſelf, before it met with its proper puniſhment and correction. So cloſe and intimate a connection between intereſt and duty, would leave no room for merit in our conduct, would reduce men to one

courſe of action, and take from amongſt them all diſtinction.

It appears from hence, that if rewards and puniſhments were now to be adminiſtered always immediately in due form, they would deſtroy or rather preclude a moral government, while they ſeem to ſupport its cauſe. For it is the nature and office of ſuch a government to diſtinguiſh between different men; to judge of the behaviour of thoſe, who have a power of thinking and chooſing for themſelves; and to decide among them according to their deſerts. But it could never have an opportunity to exert itſelf, and perform its operations upon us, if we were now put under ſuch reſtraints as are incompatible with freedom; ſuch as admit not of a diſtinction of character, and of our ſhewing our reſpective merits or demerits.

It might poſſibly afford, at the firſt view,

view, a more regular and pleaſing proſpect, were virtue and happineſs, vice and miſery, ſeen to be conſtant companions, walking on every occaſion reſpectively hand in hand together: but on a further examination of the matter it will be found neceſſary, that they be kept for the preſent in ſome degree aſunder. We can partly underſtand, how the acts of a perfect diſtributive juſtice, if executed in all inſtances immediately and in full rigour, would defeat themſelves, and put an end to the being of a moral government at its birth; and that they are to be ſuſpended for a while, in order to give liberty to men's diſpoſitions to work, and to allow time for their ſeveral deſerts to appear and arrive at ſome growth.

According to the preſent ſcheme and condition of things, where *there is one event to the righteous and to the wicked*, where a good behaviour is not always ſure of being remarkably diſtinguiſhed by

its reward, men come to diſcover themſelves; are made to ſhew what they really are, and whether they have a ſincere diſintereſted regard for virtue. General laws make the preſent world a ſtate of probation, the ſtate which God has appointed for us as the firſt in order; and are neceſſary to carry on the plan of his moral government.

They are then of this uſe; and they will be found alſo to have a juſtneſs and beauty. For it ſeems to be fit and proper, as we have faculties to inform and direct us, that we ſhould be intruſted in ſome meaſure to their guidance; and that the influence and control of external force ſhould be removed, in order to afford them room and ſcope for exerciſe. Now general laws allow of this; they grant the will a power to exert itſelf, leave us free to follow our own diſcretion and judgement, and to pay a voluntary obedience to the dictates of our reaſon and con-

conſcience. We are capable, and at the ſame time have the liberty, of chooſing for ourſelves; ſo that both the nature we are endued with, and the diſpenſation we live under, are made to ſuit and accord to each other.

But the propriety of general laws will appear ſtill further, by conſidering them as adapted to us under the condition and circumſtances, in which we firſt come into the world: for theſe, in a certain view, are the ſame in all. Men are not different, ſome righteous and others wicked, at their entrance into life. If they were, it would indeed be more difficult to reconcile ourſelves to our ſituation, and to account for the general laws by which we are governed. But the fact is, we bring not our virtues and vices along with us: it is only here that we acquire, in various degrees, thoſe habits of virtue and vice, which mark and diſtinguiſh characters. At firſt no one can lay claim,

through a greater merit, to any ſuperiority or diſtinction above others; we are ſo far upon terms of equality: and we ſeem therefore to require the ſame treatment. Now general laws do us this juſtice: they go on in a ſteady, impartial courſe, without any intended preferences, rendering to every one alike, without diſtinction.

The chief deſign we are to believe is, that men give ſome proof of themſelves in the preſent life: and general laws are neceſſary for ſuch a purpoſe. They have a fitneſs, conſidered as means leading to an end: but they alſo appear right, when viewed ſimply in themſelves, without a reference to a certain deſign; any further than as they may be ſuppoſed to have a reſpect to men in their original ſtate of equality, and to be regulated by it.

There is a time, a certain point of view, in which we appear to be all on a level, and to reſemble perfectly one another;

other; this gives general laws a propriety. But through their means we are brought to vary, to diſcover our ſeveral inclinations and diſpoſitions: this ſhews their utility. And we may further obſerve, they effect their purpoſe without doing violence; without diſcouraging too much the cauſe of virtue. For while they produce a difference of character, they at the ſame time allow that a proviſion be made for it, ſo far as is conſiſtent with their main intention. We muſt own, there is at preſent ſome diſtinction made between the righteous and the wicked. The former have for the moſt part the advantage; enjoy upon the whole more real ſatisfaction and comfort. There is a preference ſhewn them; yet in ſuch a way and degree, as ſtill to leave men in a ſtate of probation. Were it true, that all meet with exactly the ſame reception from the world, there would be the leſs reaſon to complain, as all come to it at firſt with a like recommendation: but in fact, through

an

an exuberance of divine wiſdom, juſtice in this reſpect is more than ſatisfied. Thus we find, in the œconomy of thoſe general laws by which we are governed, a ſingular contrivance, a conſummate beauty and perfection.

It appears to be no more than what is fit and requiſite, if we conſider men only in one certain poſition, that they ſhould for the preſent be treated all alike. And this, as we have ſeen, is done, ſo far as general laws are concerned. We will proceed, in the next place, to take a ſurvey of the inſtitutions of ſociety. Here, we ſhall find, there is not the like reſpect paid to men's original equality. They are placed in different ſituations: ſome in poſts of wealth and authority, others in a ſtate of indigence and ſubjection; ſome indulge themſelves in eaſe, others are condemned to labour. Government impoſes unequal conditions. She ſhews indeed her impartiality, as often

ten as ſhe grants a like protection to all. Neither is there that diſproportion in the ſatisfaction men enjoy, which we might poſſibly be led to imagine from the great diſparity in their outward circumſtances. *A man's life conſiſteth not in the abundance of the things which he poſſeſſeth.* One in a low ſtation may become reconciled, through a difference of education and the force of habit and cuſtom, to the hardſhips of his condition; and live as eaſy and contented, as they who are much his ſuperiours in rank. Thus while men are proud to introduce diſtinctions into life, nature on her part ſeems aſſiduous in preſerving happineſs upon a level. Not that ſhe can every where effect this: numbers are ſtill left in a condition, which renders them deſervedly the objects of pity. We muſt not expect to find an equal diſtribution of juſtice, that men will there be dealt with alike, where the intereſt of individuals is not the thing ſo much ſought after and conſulted, as the good

of

of the public. We ſhall conceive more truly of the end of ſociety, if we conſider it as anſwering the intention of our Maker, by promoting the general welfare of his creatures; and withal as ſerving this further purpoſe, of proving more effectually men's diſpoſition and behaviour, by means of the intercourſe they are made to have one with another, and under this inequality too of condition.

We ſhall not perhaps be ſo apt to complain, that *all things come alike to all*, as that we find this too ſeldom to be the caſe; for ſuch a diſpoſition of events, when viewed in a certain light, appears regular and equitable. And thus we might be tempted almoſt, to object to the eſtabliſhment of ſo many different orders and ranks in government, as encroaching too much on man's original equality, and violating a grand and primary law of nature. Only we ſhall do well to conſider ſeriouſly with ourſelves, whether greater advantages are not

not to be procured, by almoſt every individual, in a ſtate of ſociety, than he could poſſibly hope for, if he was to detach himſelf entirely from it; whether the beſt proviſion and ſecurity of private good and happineſs is not there to be met with, though not in an equal degree by all; and whether, in ſhort, juſtice may not there be thought to yield and give way a little, in order that benevolence may have room to exert herſelf more effectually and to better purpoſe.

SERMON VI.

On the adminiſtration of the preſent life.

He loveth righteouſneſs and judgement; the earth is full of the goodneſs of the Lord.
PSAL. xxxiii. 5.

GENERAL laws, by which *there is one event to the righteous and to the wicked*, are ſuch as give riſe to thoſe untoward appearances in the adminiſtration of the world, which are thought to argue a defect of juſtice in its Governour; as though

though he was in ſome meaſure diſpoſed alike to virtue and vice, and viewed both with an eye of indifference. But the obſervations we have before made upon thoſe laws, may be of ſome uſe perhaps in reconciling us to them, and in forming to ourſelves a more favourable idea of the divine juſtice. A vindication of the government of the preſent life is the more neceſſary, becauſe ſome urge this as an objection to a future ſtate, in which every one ſhall receive his due reward, that it of courſe ſuppoſes a more regular and perfect adminiſtration than we now experience; and is therefore to be conſidered as vain and imaginary. "For," ſay they, "a more impartial diſtribution of rewards and puniſhments, muſt proceed from a ſuperiour regard to juſtice and equity; greater good produced, muſt ſtill prove a greater degree of goodneſs; every ſuppoſed addition to the works of nature, makes an addition to the attributes of the Author of nature: and they con-

contend, we have no reaſon to give the divine benevolence and juſtice any particular extent, further than they are ſeen to be exerted at preſent. So far as the traces of any attributes appear, ſo far may we ſuppoſe thoſe attributes to exiſt: the ſuppoſition of further attributes is mere hypotheſis; much more the ſuppoſition, that in diſtant periods of place and time, there will be a more magnificent diſplay of theſe attributes, and a ſcheme or order of adminiſtration more ſuitable to ſuch imaginary virtues." * We ſhall not at this time diſpute the maxims of theſe philoſophers, but endeavour to reconcile them in ſome meaſure to the doctrine of future rewards and puniſhments, by obviating their exceptions againſt it; and by ſhewing how far it may be received conſiſtently with their favourite tenets.

They ſeem in part to be led into an er-

* Vid. Eſſay, &c.

rour, and to have conceived certain prejudices, merely from a form of expreſſion commonly made uſe of in ſpeaking on this ſubject, according to which a future life, wherein the irregularities which now ariſe are to be corrected, is ſaid on that account to be a more perfect ſtate than the preſent: whereas both ſtates, if duly conſidered, are equally perfect in their kind. They both are parts of the ſame plan; and taken together form a deſign, which in the one appears in its beginnings, but is brought to a completion in the other. It is from a like regard to juſtice, that we are firſt to be proved, and then rewarded or puniſhed according to our deſerts.

In weighing the comparative merits of the real government of this life and the ſuppoſed government of the next, we ought to have reſpect in both caſes to our circumſtances, and conſider what it is they require. We are now only in the firſt

firſt period of our exiſtence: it ſeems fit and requiſite, that we be put under a courſe of diſcipline, and be made to undergo ſome trial. A perfect adminiſtration of juſtice is foreign to our preſent condition; it may better take place in the next ſtate. Neither are we to look for a pure, unmixed happineſs here: it is to be the reward of virtue hereafter; and is held out to us as an encouragement under the difficulties we have to contend with. All we can reaſonably hope for at preſent is, that like terms, ſo far as is conſiſtent with the general good, ſhould be every where impoſed on us; and that they be not in their own nature too difficult. We indeed know not enough of ourſelves to be competent judges of the degree of trial, to which it is proper we ſhould be expoſed. We may reſt however aſſured, that *God does not ſuffer us to be tempted above that we are able:* and we may preſume, with reſpect to thoſe who poſſeſs ſuperiour advantages to others, that of

them the more will be required; and that any ſervices we perform, will be *accepted according to that a man hath, and not according to that he hath not*. This may ſuffice in ſome ſort to ſhew the meaſure, in which we might expect the divine juſtice and benevolence to be diſpenſed for the preſent. Hereafter God may diſtribute rewards and puniſhments both with a more liberal and regular hand: not that they will denote "a ſuperiour regard to juſtice and equity," but be ſuch as our future condition demands, and renders more fit and ſeaſonable.

In ſuppoſing another life to follow after this, for which there is ſome authority, we may be ſaid to make an "addition to the preſent works of nature;" however, we do not at the ſame time make an "addition to the moral attributes of their Author." For while we hold, that we are to be diſpoſed of, according to the changes and alterations pro-

produced in us, in different ſtates in ſucceſſion, we conceive only a like propriety to appear in the adjuſting of them to our circumſtances. God is believed to be every where and in all times the ſame: it is man, the object of his meaſures, that in the courſe of an eternity varies. Nay, according to our rude conceptions, it may ſeem a matter of greater difficulty, a more arduous exertion of the powers of wiſdom, to place us in a proper ſituation in the firſt, than in any ſubſequent ſtage of our exiſtence.

Thus a future ſtate, where rewards and puniſhments will be accurately diſtributed, does not, as it is objected, neceſſarily ſuppoſe a more magnificent diſplay of the divine attributes, a more regular and perfect adminiſtration, than at preſent. The divine attributes are conceived indeed to exert themſelves differently, as a difference of occaſions requires:

quires: but they exhibit in both caſes an adminiſtration equally juſt and perfect.

But we will proceed to conſider, as far as we can collect from a view of our preſent condition, the particular way and degree, in which the moral attributes of the Deity appear to be exerted: in order to ſhew more diſtinctly, that a future ſtate of rewards and puniſhments requires only a ſimilar exertion; and is to be maintained at only a like expenſe of divine benevolence and juſtice.

We have been deſcribed as living under the government of general laws, and in a ſtate of ſociety. And firſt then as to general laws; we have before ſeen the manner in which we may conceive juſtice to be adminiſtered by their means: and we muſt allow alſo, that the divine goodneſs is communicated to us largely through the ſame channel. It ſhould ſeem indeed, from ſacred hiſtory, as if more favourable

and

and indulgent laws had originally been intended for mankind, than thoſe which are now in force; as if the ſeaſons were to have been more kindly and genial; and the earth was to have yielded its increaſe, both with more willingneſs and in greater abundance. Nature was deſirous of wearing a benign aſpect, but ſhe was made to frown by the tranſgreſſion of our firſt parents: and ſhe ſtill retains the marks of her diſpleaſure. The ground was curſed for their ſake: and we continue to eat of it by the ſweat of the brow. The chief burden indeed of this labour is thrown, in ſocieties, on certain ranks. Yet it is impoſſible for men, whatever be their rank, to diveſt themſelves of all thought, if they would live with credit or ſatisfaction. We can make no improvement in ourſelves, acquire no virtue, nor arrive at any uſeful and valuable attainment, but by attention and diligence. Nay without care, we are apt to break out into all the exceſſes of vice and folly.

Our minds, like the ground we tread upon, without cultivation will naturally run wild, ſhoot up and be overgrown with weeds. If then we are to ſuppoſe, this proneneſs to ſin and wickedneſs, this imperfection and degeneracy in our own conſtitution as well as in that of the earth, to follow as an effect of the fall of Adam; here is an evil entailed on his poſterity, in the repairing of which it behooves all to ſuſtain a like part. We may diſcover however in the laws of nature, as they ſubſiſt at preſent, a kindneſs and beneficence: they are not to be complained of for impoſing on us ſome care and labour: for to ſuch beings as we are, this itſelf would be a miſery, to be left without employment. If ſome are buſied in tilling the ground, we are all concerned in the due management and cultivation of ourſelves: and it is through a kindly proviſion of nature, that our labours of every kind, when ſincere, fail not of having a good effect.

But

But the laws of nature appear favourable and propitious, more eſpecially from conſidering their uniform conſtancy; a matter, as indeed we have ſhewn already, of the greateſt importance. The neceſſaries and conveniences of life are ſupplied by means of the various arts men have ſought after and diſcovered. But leſt we ſhould value ourſelves too much upon our ſucceſs, let us recollect the acknowledgments due to God. He is the giver of thoſe faculties, which enable us to make a ſearch. Our chief merit is that of not ſuffering our talents to lie idle. And even when we come to exert them, he may be ſaid to cooperate with us, by maintaining a conſtant uniformity in the courſe of nature. For without this proviſion, the efforts we uſe, would either be diſappointed of their aim, or attended with no laſting advantage. But now, as the conſtitution of things is invariable, thoſe rules, which have once been found out, are to be put in practice ever after with

with the like effect: and thus the pains and ſtudy, employed at any time by others in ſome uſeful invention or diſcovery that they have made, are not loſt to us, but redound to our good; and we become enriched not only by our own but the accumulated experience of mankind. In ſo ample a manner does God contribute to the bleſſings derived to us, either through our own labour and ingenuity, or that of other men.

Thus far concerning the laws of nature; we come next to conſider the emoluments we receive from living in ſociety: and of theſe too God is to be thought the original Author. He gives men thoſe affections which diſpoſe them to unite and aſſociate together: ſo that it may be doubted, whether a ſtate of nature has at any time exiſted, where numbers, abiding in the ſame country, have choſen to live ſeparate and diſtinct one from another, without mixing together, and forming them-

themſelves into aſſemblies. God has prepared thoſe bands, which bring and tie us together; only he leaves us free to ſettle the laws of communion ourſelves: he plants in men the ſeeds of government; they model the particular form. And they muſt make an unhappy choice if they fix upon one, which ſo far fails of its end, as not to have the advantage over a ſtate of ſolitude.

Some viſionary men, however, make it a queſtion, whether the evils of ſociety do not more than balance the good; and whether on the whole civil inſtitutions are beneficial? As to juſtice indeed; they will grant, it is only to be met with in ſocieties, of which it is ſo entire and abſolute a creature, that it cannot exiſt out of them, nor have ſo much as a place in a ſtate of nature, where there is no property. Yet ſurely there, men muſt be thought to have at leaſt a property in their lives: not but that the claims of

juſtice

juſtice will be greatly multiplied in civil ſocieties; and will at the ſame time be more effectually guarded, than in a mere ſtate of nature, where there are no poſitive laws to reſtrain violence.

Neither is it to be denied, that in ſocieties we muſt meet with a greater ſupply of the comforts and conveniences of life. Where men conſpire, as in government, in directing their endeavours to the ſame point, the advantages which ariſe will greatly exceed ſuch, as can poſſibly fall to the ſhare of the ſame number of men living in a ſtate of nature, unconnected and detached from one another, without any intercourſe, or combination of their ſeveral powers in purſuit of a common end. And as the ſum total of happineſs will here be greater: ſo will the individuals of the various orders in ſociety be enabled, from their different habits of education, to partake of it, in ſome ſort, in equal and juſt portions. God indeed has made a ſtill

a ſtill further proviſion. He has endued us with a fellow-feeling; that we may be ready at all times to interpoſe in the behalf of one another, and to relieve and comfort thoſe who are in neceſſity and diſtreſs.

Thus we may trace in civil inſtitutions, as well as in the laws of nature, certain outlines of divine benevolence and juſtice. They who bear rule in ſociety, are *the powers ordained of God*; are miniſters appointed by him to execute judgement: the rich are his ſtewards, who are to ſupply out of their ſuperfluity the deficiency of others. He conſtitutes both his repreſentatives on the earth, through whoſe hands he diſpenſes his bleſſings: and to him they muſt at one time render an account of the diſcharge of their truſt.

After this view of the ways, by which the divine juſtice and benevolence are conveyed to us, we come next to conſider the

the particular degree. And here, in making our calculation, it is fit we proceed, not on what we find to happen in fact, but on what we can conceive might poſſibly be the caſe, were men only wiſe or good enough to improve the advantages put into their power.

We ſee how God has prepared for us the way of happineſs. Nature, by his appointment, is ready to requite any labour we beſtow upon her; and to anſwer our wiſhes, on a proper application. We ſay indeed, that a change has been made in her diſpoſition for the worſe; and that ſhe is not ſo liberal and beneficent as at the firſt. Thus we imagine, ſhe is not ſo free in imparting to us the good endowments and graces of the mind. However, ſhe gives us the power of ſupplying in ſome meaſure this defect, by means of the improved habits we have the capacity of acquiring: and if we are ſincere in the wiſh, we may become as good and virtu-

ous as we deſire. We alſo think, that in regard to our bodily wants, ſhe makes too ſcanty a proviſion: and yet, ſuch is our inconſiſtency, we take not care to manage well her gifts, even while we complain of her want of generoſity. Some are laviſh in the uſe of them, and conſume too much upon themſelves; ſome trample them under foot, and make a waſte by plunder and rapine; ſome hoard them up and withhold them from public uſe: and thus a ſcarcity is apt to be brought on in the midſt of plenty. How might ſociety be made to flouriſh, would but the ſeveral members of it conform to the will of the original Founder, by doing their duty in that ſtation to which he calls them? In what a manſion too are we placed? encompaſſed around with a magnificence and glory, that makes it ſeem too great and ſuperb for ſo inconſiderable an inhabitant.

God has been profuſely kind and indulgent

dulgent in providing for us. He invites us to consult our own and each other's welfare. It is man who is his own enemy. We envy ourselves the bliss of which we are put into possession. If so little comfort is to be met with in the world, the fault is our's. It is through our folly and perverseness, that Justice dwells not in the land, and that the earth is not *full of the goodness of the Lord.*

It remains, that we apply all that has been said of our present state, to the consideration of our future condition; and, from the estimate we have taken of this life, form our opinion of that which is to follow.

SER-

SERMON VII.

On a future life, described after the model of the present.

The same yesterday, and to day, and for ever.
HEBR. xiii. 8.

WE will now look forward to the next world: and leſt we ſhould ſeem to take it for granted, that the attributes of divine benevolence and juſtice will there be exerted in ſome different or ſuperiour manner, we will ſuppoſe our preſent and future condition to agree in

their main, conſtituent parts; and the rather, as there appears to be ſome authority for it in Scripture. Thus we are taught to believe, that good men will live hereafter in communion and fellowſhip one with another: and we may ſuppoſe, that we ſhall be governed by general laws; which, according as they are eaſy or rigorous, are but another name for rewards and puniſhments.

But then, as we conſider the future adminiſtration of affairs to be no more than an image or copy of the preſent ſyſtem, we muſt imagine thoſe only to be put under the government of the ſame laws, who are found, at the time they are diſpoſed of in another ſtate, to bear ſome reſemblance of character. For we, who ſubſiſt together in this world, were at the firſt entirely upon a level; though afterward we come to vary much from one another. It is neceſſary, in order to preſerve the ſame rule of œconomy, that

thoſe only are to be adjudged to the ſame ſtate, among whom there ſubſiſts an equality, or at leaſt ſome ſimilitude. It is agreed to allow every where to the moral attributes of the Deity a like exertion in manner and degree: but if they, in whom there is a wide difference of character and a great diſparity of merit, were to be admitted into one and the ſame place, the entrance into the next life would not be guarded by the juſtice, which is ſtationed here. This leads us to expect, agreeably to what we find declared in Scripture, that finally there will be a ſeparation among men, between the virtuous and vicious, the clean and unclean; and that the gates, at which the righteous are allowed to enter, will be ſhut upon the wicked.

We will now make a ſuppoſition the leaſt favourable, ſuch as may ſeem even repugnant and diſguſtful to enlightened reaſon, that the future habitation allotted

to good men will not be different from the preſent, like laws of nature reigning in both; and that they will be ſubject alſo to pain and ſickneſs, to the like accidents and misfortunes as before. Yet ſtill there will be a great improvement in their condition, merely from their living in a ſociety, where all the members ſo far reſemble one another, as to be in a certain degree virtuous. There will prevail among them a more general harmony, a cloſer union of wills and affections. They will be able to avail themſelves in a larger meaſure of thoſe natural benefits, which the bounty of God lays before them; and which at preſent we ſo often intercept and deprive ourſelves of, through our folly and wickedneſs. The advantages they procure will be greater than before; the evils they ſuffer much fewer. The moderation and virtue they all poſſeſs alike, will be their common ſecurity. They will be more free from the miſchiefs of malice, fraud and injuſtice, law-

leſs

leſs tyranny and ambition; ſee leſs of thoſe diſorders, which deform this life, and make in it ſo wild a waſte. It is inconceivable, even on this ſuppoſition, what a change will be made in the face of their affairs.

But indeed we ought not to imagine, that good men will be removed into a like ſtate, and be made ſubject hereafter to the ſame laws as before. For wherever God may think fit, in his benevolence and juſtice, to place men at firſt, before they have given any proof of themſelves; he will be diſpoſed, we may believe, by the ſame benevolence and juſtice, to prepare for ſuch as ſhall have recommended themſelves by their behaviour, a better and more favourable ſituation. This bring us to apply again the words of Scripture; The good ſhall be raiſed to life with *glorified* bodies; ſhall know pain and ſickneſs no more; *new heavens and a new earth* ſhall be created for them, ſuitable

to their improved natures; and they ſhall be advanced to the *aſſembly of juſt men made perfect*. There every thing will conſpire to their bliſs: the beams of divine happineſs will be reflected upon them on all ſides. They may be ſaid to walk in the *light of God's countenance*; to ſtand before the throne of that ineffable being, in whoſe *preſence is the fulneſs of joy*.

But as we are delineating things future after the pattern of things preſent, we ought perhaps rather to ſuppoſe, that the improvements made in good men will be gradual; that they will arrive at the ſummit of perfection by ſteps: and not paſs immediately out of a ſtate of frail mortality into one of abſolute happineſs. For beſides that ſuch a tranſition may ſeem abrupt, it may not be thought altogether agreeable to the preſent courſe of nature, where we find advances are made ſlowly. We may imagine then, if

it

it is to be allowed that the reſources of the mind are inexhauſtible, and that its faculties are capable of augmentation without limit, a number of ſtates to follow one another, each provided with a ſyſtem of general laws correſponding to the ſeveral changes that are made in us, and to which we are to ſucceed in order, as our natures continue to improve. It is eaſy to conceive, how the condition of good men, according to this ſuppoſition, perpetually grows better, as they advance in knowledge and virtue; and how they draw nearer and nearer to the throne of perfection by continual approaches.

This we ſuppoſe to be the rule of ſucceſſion in thoſe ſtates, that none be appointed heirs of one and the ſame ſtate, and placed under the government of like laws, but ſuch as agree within certain limits of a moral reſemblance. Yet it is poſſible, that they who are ſimilar and nearly equal may afterward, by taking to

different courſes, make different improvements; ſo that their characters will come to deviate from the original proportion: and by this means thoſe general laws, which we imagine always to be adapted to us in the particular condition in which we enter any ſtate, cannot retain throughout the juſtneſs and propriety they had at firſt. Thus we may ſuppoſe diſorders every where to ariſe, much in the ſame way as at preſent: but we can conceive how they are perpetually rectified; how juſtice reſtores herſelf upon every new tranſlation; and how each ſucceeding ſtate corrects the errours of that which goes before. In all this, the moral attributes of the Deity are not extended and amplified beyond their preſent bounds: his natural attributes indeed are taken for granted, that he has a power ſufficient for theſe things; but his benevolence and juſtice obſerve all along a like form, and go on in the ſame courſe and tenour.

They who are placed in the ſame ſtate, but, by following different purſuits, make different advances towards moral perfection, will find indeed an immediate recompenſe, in a certain degree, according to a due proportion; ſo far as virtue, by the very diſpoſition and nature of things, is made its own reward: not but they muſt wait for a removal into a new ſtate, before complete juſtice is done; when, agreeably to the rule which may be ſuppoſed to obtain at preſent, thoſe who have made an equal progreſs, will be promoted to a like ſituation.

Thus a future ſtate, where the good may look for a ſuperiour happineſs, ſeems deducible from the preſent, by obſerving what is thought to be the juſt and true law of experience. We complain of this earthly tabernacle, as a frail, imperfect building; and yet there ariſes out of it another edifice, which, though far ſurpaſſing in weight of glory, is conſtructed

ſtructed upon the ſame rules, formed after the ſame model.

It might alſo be made to appear, in a ſimilar manner, that hereafter there awaits the wicked a worſe ſituation than the preſent. But we have already perſiſted too long in what may ſeem a train of folly and extravagance at leaſt, if not preſumption, into which we have been betrayed, in order to accommodate ourſelves to thoſe, who make experience the rule of life, and the ſtandard by which we are to regulate our expectations.

The ſum of the evidence produced in favour of a future ſtate of rewards and puniſhments, is as follows. When we firſt enter this life, we are incapable of thought and reflection; our minds are clear of any impreſſions, and we are void of all merit or demerit. Our ſituation, however, is ſuch, as affords us opportunities of improving our faculties, and of acquir-

acquiring habits of virtue. Indeed, both good and evil are ſet before us: and according to the choice we make, we become poſſeſſed of the merit or demerit, of which we were originally deſtitute. It was therefore argued, that this life is a ſtate of diſcipline, or rather probation, the forerunner of one, in which our well-being is to depend on our behaviour and the improvement we make here*. This appears ſtill further, from conſidering our particular conſtitution and nature. We, above all creatures, have a ſenſe to diſtinguiſh between right and wrong; are endued with a perception and knowledge of of the rules of morality: and it was concluded from the argument of final cauſes, to be the intention of our Maker, to judge us by the law, which he has made us in ſo ſingular a manner capable of underſtanding †. But ſeveral objections lie in the way of the concluſion we want to eſtabliſh. Firſt it is ſaid, we are

* Serm. I. † Serm. II.

are unable to judge of the deſigns of the Deity, or reaſon at all concerning the intentions of ſo ſingular a Being: and it was neceſſary to ſhew, that this muſt not be ſuppoſed to take place in the preſent inſtance, ſo as to preclude the knowledge of a future ſtate of rewards and puniſhments *. It is alſo alleged, that a ſtate, wherein all are to receive the due reward of their deeds, has no foundation in experience, and is to be deemed imaginary: it was therefore neceſſary, in order to remove this objection and enable us to conceive the more juſtly of our preſent condition, to take into conſideration the œconomy of the general laws by which we are governed †. In treating of the adminiſtration of this life, we endeavoured to trace the ways, in which the divine benevolence and juſtice appear to be exerted ‡: with a view of deſcribing a future ſtate upon a like ſyſtem; and of ſhewing, even conformably to the law of expe-

* Serm. III. † Serm. IV. V. ‡ Serm. VI.

experience, how more happineſs may be conceived to ariſe hereafter to the good, and more miſery to the bad, than they meet with at preſent *.

Thus the conſideration of our nature and condition has not only brought us to conclude in general, that the wicked will be made miſerable, and the righteous happy, in another life: but enabled us to deſcribe in ſome meaſure the ways, by which we may conceive the future good and evil of the virtuous and the vicious to be reſpectively promoted. It muſt again be repeated, that in making this delineation, which may poſſibly be thought raſh, and to ſtand in need of an apology, we muſt be underſtood to have adapted ourſelves to thoſe who maintain, that in all our enquiries we are to be determined by experience; and that we are to form our eſtimate of the future law and plan of divine juſtice, from our obſervations

* Serm. VII.

vations on its present measure and course.

Hitherto, then, in compliance with the maxims advanced by certain philosophers, we have attempted to explain, how far the doctrine of future rewards and punishments may be maintained on the ground of experience; so that they seem to oppose the belief of it by misapplying in some degree their own principles. As to what remains; we shall endeavour to shew in the following discourse, that their principles, though properly applied, are in themselves narrow and defective: and that in forming to ourselves an idea of God and his government, they are not to be admitted as reasonable and just.

SER-

SERMON VIII.

On experience, considered as the ſtandard and meaſure of our expectations.

Who is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we aſk or think. EPHES. iii. 20.

"THE experienced train of events," we are told, "is the great ſtandard by which we are to regulate our expectations: nothing elſe can be appealed to in the field or in the ſenate; nothing elſe ought ever to be heard of in the ſchool

ſchool or in the cloſet." It is repreſented as a matter of mere ſpeculation and curioſity to inquire, "what it is the diſpoſition of things proceeds from, whether an intelligence and deſign, or not; for whatever it proceeds from, the diſpoſition itſelf, on which depends our happineſs or miſery, and conſequently our conduct and deportment in life, is ſtill the ſame. No event can be foreſeen or foretold, no reward or puniſhment expected or dreaded, beyond what is already known by practice or obſervation"*.

The diſpoſition of things will by no means furniſh every where like rules of conduct and behaviour, ſo long as it is not underſtood alike, and ſeen in one and the ſame light. Men, according as they conſider and apply their experience, will found on it a ſyſtem of ethics very different. If ſome conceive it not reconcileable with the truths of natural religion,

* Vid. Eſſay, &c.

gion, and therefore ſet it up in oppoſition to them; it will appear, as underſtood by others, to be quite conſiſtent, and will ſerve to confirm them in their faith.

Yet after all; preſent experience, of which we are told ſo often and ſo much, that boaſted giant, whoſe praiſes and virtues are wont to be extolled in ſo high a ſtrain, and recited with ſuch complacency, is really in itſelf a thing low and contemptible. Our acquaintance with life can ſupply us with no great variety of knowledge. All that has hitherto come to paſs, is no more than a repetition of the ſame matter; *and there is no new thing under the ſun.* A race of men are brought upon the ſtage, where they act a part for a few years, and then make room for another generation. This is the whole of what we have ſeen of our hiſtory; and includes in fact a period only of ſixty or ſeventy years, repeated indeed over and over, as men continue to riſe up in ſuc-

ceſſion to one another, but without making any advances or further progreſs in the ſyſtem of divine government. The actual knowledge and experience we have of God's adminiſtration, is confined entirely to the narrow limits of this preſent life: but we are to remain ſubject to it for ever. All then that has hitherto appeared, is to be deemed an inconſiderable part of ſomething that is to follow; no more than the beginning of a ſcheme, which is to receive its completion hereafter. Indeed the little we have ſeen of God's government over us, ſcarce deſerves to be dignified by the name of experience, and can afford but a poor and ſcanty information of all that remains to be brought to light.

It is not to be imagined that the way, in which we find things adminiſtered at preſent, affords a juſt and exact ſpecimen of God's future government: the treatment proper for us in one ſituation, may not

not be equally fit in another. When we came into the world our minds were naked and unfurniſhed, clear of all impreſſions: by degrees we contract habits, either good or bad; ſuch too as depend on our own choice. We appear very different beings at the times of our entrance into life and departure out of it.

A change is neceſſarily made in every man's condition, whether viewed ſingly by itſelf, or compared with that of others. We all were originally upon an equality; not diſtinguiſhable by any merit or demerit. Men ſet off at firſt from the ſame term; they afterwards take to ſeveral courſes. And ſhould God interpoſe, immediately on their beginning to ſeparate, by puniſhing or rewarding them to the full for every good or bad action, this might be the means indeed of reducing them to a ſameneſs of character; but with a degree of force and compulſion. At preſent, an alteration is produced both in

man's abſolute and relative ſtate: and is it not ſuch as may occaſion new meaſures, give riſe to a different form of adminiſtration, when God comes to diſpoſe of us hereafter?

We ſhould be unwilling to believe that any Legiſlator, ſuch as a Lycurgus or a Solon, who had provided a certain people with a body of laws for their government, would think of adapting to them the very ſame laws without variation, if by ſome means or other an entire revolution had been brought about in their manners and ſituation. Whence comes it then, "that we are to expect no reward or puniſhment, beyond what is already known by practice and obſervation;" and are to ſuppoſe, if we exiſt hereafter at all, that we ſhall continue under much the ſame diſpenſation as at preſent, notwithſtanding the change that may here have been wrought in us? Was the world indeed a machine, where all that happens

is

is the effect of mere matter and motion, without a ſuperiour principle to guide and direct it, we could better conceive perhaps, how things might for ever go on in the ſame track: and it might be fit for us to regulate our behaviour by preſent experience, ſtrictly ſo called. But the one is not ſo credible, nor the other ſo prudent, on the ſuppoſition that an overruling intelligence diſpoſes of events: for then it may reaſonably be apprehended, as ſoon as this life comes to an end, that another order and diſpoſition of things will take place; that a new ſtate is to commence.

God no doubt will every where adjuſt his meaſures to our condition. This may lawfully be preſumed. We find that all animals are diſpoſed of, according to their ſeveral natures, each in their proper element. And will not the wiſdom, that appears in the arrangement of the irrational part of the creation, be diſplayed

alſo in the government of the intellectual world? Should it be objected, that in fact a like order and œconomy is not viſible in both; that virtue and vice are, as it were, creatures of an oppoſite nature, and yet we find them placed in the ſame element together, where *there is one event to the righteous and to the wicked*; in anſwer to this it may be obſerved, that a difference of character, that the diſtinction of righteous and wicked, does not ſubſiſt among men when firſt they are brought into the world, but is introduced afterward. Their merits originally ſtood upon a level, which will help to explain the treatment they meet with; and ſhew in ſome ſort whence it is, that the ſame habitation is allotted them, where *all things come alike to all*. We think indeed we even can diſcover a juſtneſs in ſuch an appointment. And when we conſider this world as a ſtate of probation, the true light in which it is to be viewed, we alſo ſee the uſe and neceſſity of a promiſcuous diſtribution

bution of good and evil: but we are not to imagine that thoſe diſorders, as they are called, which, in our preſent circumſtances, may be fit, and proceed upon reaſons both of expediency and propriety, will be ſuffered to continue, when thoſe reaſons ſubſiſt no longer.

It is neceſſary we keep in mind, how circumſtances vary with us. At firſt we are void of all character: at laſt we come to acquire one. Men originally reſemble one another, and agree ſo far, as to ſtand all alike clear of any accounts. During their progreſs in life, they enter into different engagements; contract debts various in kind, which at laſt accumulate to ſuch a ſum, that it may be proper an account ſhould be taken of them. We cannot therefore infer, from the manner in which rewards and puniſhments are now diſtributed, the future mode of their regulation: preſent experience, eſpecially as underſtood by ſome, muſt not be

thought to ſhew it; we cannot take our eſtimate from thence.

In the houſe of God are many manſions, inhabited, it may be, by different orders of intellectual beings, among whom various laws reign, various diſpenſations ſubſiſt, as their ſeveral capacities or conditions require. There are however, within the ſphere of our knowledge, creatures without number, each under regulations peculiar to their own kind. But if different creatures are treated differently, the like may be ſuppoſed of the ſame creatures, in different periods of their exiſtence. We are now only in our firſt ſtage, in the very infancy of our being. Rude, as we are, and unformed, we are placed in this world: and we can partly comprehend in what reſpects we are properly ſituated. But when we conſider the nature of the human mind, and what further attaintments it is capable of; how much our wills may be refined, and

how

how our underſtandings may be enlarged without limit; we ſhall think it not impoſſible, but there may be a variety of ſtates, differing in degrees of happineſs, to which, if we fall not ſhort of the glories reſerved for us, we are to ſucceed, as we advance in knowledge and virtue. From the throne of God proceed fountains of living water, at which all creatures drink, each in the place of their abode, and diſtinguiſhed by their ſeveral claſſes. To us, at our immenſe diſtance and in this vale of miſery, the ſtream that flows is not pure and unmixed: but then we are to travel forward, and draw nearer and nearer to the lofty ſource of happineſs and perfection, by infinite gradations, by endleſs approaches.

Having our minds big with ſuch reflections, we ſhall be unwilling to be perſuaded, that the parts of our preſent and future exiſtence are exactly of a piece and reſemble each other; that this life is to be

be made the ſtandard of our expectations, a kind of boundary; ſo that we are to form to ourſelves no hope of a future happineſs, which falls not within its limits, and is not confirmed by practice and obſervation: inſtead of attending to ſuch maxims of philoſophy, we ſhall rather be inclined to liſten to the voice of Scripture, where it ſpeaks a language, more agreeable both to our natural deſires and the genuine dictates of reaſon; *eye hath not ſeen nor ear heard, neither have entered the heart of man, the things which God has prepared for them that love him.*

"Allowing a God to be the Author of the exiſtence and order of the univerſe; it follows," we are told, "that he poſſeſſes the preciſe degree of power, intelligence, and benevolence, which appear in his workmanſhip: but nothing further can ever be proved, except we call in the aſſiſtance of exaggeration and flattery to ſupply the defects of argument and reaſoning."

ſoning *." This workmanſhip ſurpaſſes the reach and compaſs of our underſtandings; is not commenſurate with our faculties: and in attempting to aſſign its preciſe degree of excellence, there is danger, leſt by undervaluing or miſconceiving of the performance, we do injuſtice to the merits of the Author.

How then, it may be aſked, are proceed in this matter, about which, it is confeſſed, we are ſo little able to think juſtly? Shall we ſit down in ſilence; keep all judgement in utter ſuſpenſe: and neither preſume to cenſure or approve, blame or commend? This, under the appearance of modeſty and candour, is real perverſeneſs and impiety.

Nothing remains for us, but to liſten to the advice of the holy Pen-man: he will exhort us to give a looſe to our unbounded praiſe and admiration; *to put forth*

* Vid. Eſſay, &c.

forth all our ſtrength, and not be weary, for we can never go far enough. And this, however contrary it may be to the maxims of modern philoſophers, ſeems to have ſome foundation in the reaſon of things. For when we revolve in our thoughts the government of the univerſe, conſider its nature and form, that it is in all reſpects of an unlimited deſign, includes, as it were, in its circumference, all variety of being, all parts both of ſpace and time; ſo that it may have reſpect to ends, both too remote and too complex to be diſtinctly and fully comprehended by us: when we reflect on the wonderful wiſdom and power by which it is contrived and ſupported, ſo that thoſe ends may be accompliſhed by ways with which we are utterly unacquainted: and laſtly when we call to mind the relation we ſtand in to the Governor himſelf: we muſt be diſpoſed to think ſo favourably of it as to believe, it involves a ſcheme of benevolence and juſtice, more ample and per-

perfect than we can diſcover and trace; contains a fund of inexhauſtible excellence, which will unfold itſelf more and more, as we advance in our experience, and improve in knowledge and wiſdom. Any idea then to be formed of the attributes of the Deity, from our narrow imperfect views, is greatly inadequate. They are exerted in a degree further than we ſee or comprehend. They are immenſe; fill and occupy the mind in proportion to its meaſure and capacity. The object is boundleſs, to be ſeen only by parts greater or leſs, according as the eye that contemplates, is more or leſs perfect.

The perſuaſion that flattery is unbecoming a philoſopher, who aims only at truth, will have a different effect on different minds. If ſome are poſſeſſed with I know not what jealouſy and fear, leſt they ſhould betray an unphiloſophical complaiſance, were they to allow of the divine attributes further than they appear in

in their judgement to be exerted; others, on the contrary, will think, that by admitting them no further, they pay a profane compliment to themſelves.

On the whole; we allow a man, in his religious inquiries, the free uſe and exerciſe of his reaſon: only he muſt not preſume too much upon it; and conſider it as the ſtandard by which he is to meaſure the "preciſe degree of divine benevolence and juſtice." Let him read the volume of nature, even with the eye of a Critic: yet of a modeſt ingenuous Critic; one who is ſenſible, that it is a book on which he is unable to comment ſo very learnedly, as to beſtow on each paſſage its due proportion of praiſe or cenſure, and make every where, as he goes along, an accurate diſtribution of critical juſtice. Having done then his utmoſt to give, what he thinks, a faithful explanation, let him be mindful to add this as an appendix to his other obſervations,

that the works of his Author muſt be ſuppoſed after all to contain numberleſs beauties, which he has not the knowledge and abilities diſtinctly to point out. We allow a religious man to be a practical Philoſopher, to attend cloſely to the "experienced train of events." They will confirm him in the belief, that his future happineſs depends on his behaviour at preſent. Yet in regulating his conduct by principles of experience, he is too humble, or rather too aſpiring, to confine his expectations and hopes ſtrictly to the limits of probability as marked out by himſelf. There are hidden treaſures in the depth of the riches of divine wiſdom and power; ſo that things, we may believe, *will work together for good to them that love God*, in a way and degree further than we can poſſibly foreſee or conceive. *Now unto him who is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we aſk or think, unto him be glory in the Church throughout all ages* *.

* The Eſſay, of which ſome parts have been conſidered in

in the courſe of the foregoing Sermons, concludes with theſe words, which are remarkable; "I much doubt whether it be poſſible for a cauſe to be known only by its effect, or to be of ſo ſingular and particular a nature, as to have no parallel and no ſimilarity with any other cauſe or object, that has ever fallen under our obſervation. 'Tis only when two ſpecies of objects are found to be conſtantly conjoined, that we can infer the one from the other; and were an effect preſented, which was entirely ſingular, and could not be comprehended under any known ſpecies; I do not ſee, that we could form any conjecture or inference at all concerning its cauſe. If experience and analogy be, indeed, the only guides we can reaſonably follow in inferences of this nature; both the effect and cauſe muſt bear a ſimilarity and reſemblance to other effects and cauſes which we know, and which we have found in many inſtances to be conjoined with each other." The matter, which lies involved in this dark abſtruſe phraſeology, is, it muſt be feared, ſome myſtery or other of iniquity. According to the author's account, it is a hint, or a difficulty, "which he juſt propoſes, without inſiſting on it, leſt it lead into reaſonings of too nice and delicate a nature." It ſhould ſeem, as if we might apply to our modern philoſopher, the following paſſage of Cicero, which deſcribes certain philoſophers of antient times; "hi dubitant de mundo, caſune ipſe ſit effectus aut neceſſitate aliqua, an ratione ac mente divina: et Archimedem arbitrantur plus valuiſſe in imitandis ſphæræ converſionibus, quam naturam in efficiendis*." This appears as if it was almoſt purpoſely intended for our author's argument: and ſuffices to ſhew, how an affectation of novelty and refinement is apt to bring us, in the courſe of our reaſonings, to a concluſion which, to a plain underſtanding at leaſt, will ſeem an abſurdity.

* Nat. Deor. Lib. II.

10 FE 60